

Fourth Sunday of Lent

John 9: 1 - 41 Jesus heals a blind man

One of my granddaughters, who was studying in France, was able to get home this last week. I know she was hoping to take her exams before she got home, but I haven't had a chance to find out. And now that she's home, she has to self-quarantine for two weeks. And if she stays in her parent's home, that means that the rest of the family has to do the same. But all in all, it's good that she's home.

How things changed in one week. In our state the restaurants, bars and churches are all closed. We are all beginning to worry about how long this will be, and what we can do to prepare for it, assuming we can actually find what we need in the stores. And maybe the worst thing for many of us is that our routines are disrupted. I usually know where I'm going to be and what I'll be doing each day of the week. And that's all uncertain now, and it seems like time is hanging heavy.

But there is a word for what we are going through -- apocalypse. That means lifting the veil, showing what was hidden. And the gospel today is about the same thing.

The apostles see the blind man and to them he is an object. "Whose sin, his or his parents, made him blind?" Because something had to cause this, and it's important that we know so that we can avoid it. But Jesus says, neither; Jesus doesn't deny sin, but of course we are all sinners. Jesus implies that God doesn't punish people for sins, he doesn't inflict blindness, he doesn't set loose a virus that is rapidly spreading throughout the world.

And Jesus makes a paste out of spit and dirt and puts it in the man's eyes. I don't know why he did this, but it kind of reminds you of God forming Adam out of the dirt. He then tells the man to go and wash in a specific pool. Up to this point, Jesus hasn't promised healing, nor has the man requested it. But to Jesus he is not an object to be ignored or pitied or tossed a few coins. Jesus, unlike his apostles, speaks to him and not about him. To Jesus, he is a fellow human being and maybe this was just enough for the blind man to trust him. And of course, at the pool the man can see again.

Jesus restores the man's connections. And this current plague should remind us how we are all connected. We are all interdependent. As the stock market crumbles and people who wait on tables, who bartend, who work for churches and synagogues are sidelined, for many it will be a severe economic blow. And it will affect many people who depend on the stock market for their retirement income. And even the wealthiest people will discover that they can't isolate themselves.

I think it's interesting that the townspeople don't recognize the man. He isn't the "blind beggar" anymore; he looks like everyone else. And his parents, rather than rejoicing, fear being expelled from the synagogue, and themselves almost deny their son -- "We do not know," they say, "ask him, he's a grown man". And of course, the Pharisees actively try to get the man born blind to attribute his healing to something, anything, else. "Give God the glory," they say; because the man has been giving Jesus the glory, and that's totally unacceptable. And in the face of this coronavirus, many of us will hunker down, as they say, and maybe learn nothing from the experience; maybe, like the Pharisees, we will refuse to recognize what is being revealed about how fragile our lives are, how human are those who govern us, how noble are

those who work on the front lines -- not only medical personnel, but grocery store workers, delivery people, those who keep our lights on and our water clean. And maybe when this is over, we will start to recognize these invisible heroes as fellow human beings, maybe even more important than our politicians in keeping our communities orderly and safe.

The blind man starts out by trusting Jesus, whom he has no reason to trust. As things progress, he keeps falling back on the fact that at Jesus' hands he became able to see. No matter what the authorities say, no matter what they demand, he can only say, "If this man were not of God, he could not do anything." In the story, the blind man's faith increases in the face of pressure and adversity, even to the point of being thrown out of the synagogue. He is rewarded by Jesus revealing to him that he is Lord, he is the Son of Man promised by Daniel. And that is perhaps the final point in our apocalypse; what will we learn from this? How will the plague change us? Will we strengthen our faith? Because God didn't cause this plague except in the sense that God is behind everything that happens. But in God's world, all that happens speaks to us, and some of us will listen and learn, others will not. And we remember Jesus' words, "I come into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see might see, and those who do see might become blind."